



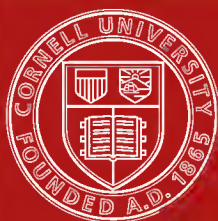
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SERMON,
ADDRESSED TO THE LEGISLATURE
OF THE STATE OF
CONNECTICUT,
AT THE
ANNUAL ELECTION
IN
NEW-HAVEN,
MAY 1st, 1822.

——
BY THOMAS CHURCH BROWNELL, D.D. LL.D.
Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Connecticut.

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NEW-HAVEN:

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE LEGISLATURE.
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1822.

AT a General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, holden at New-Haven, in said State, on the first Wednesday of May, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty-two.

ORDERED, That the Hon. **WILLIAM MOSELEY** and **RALPH I. INGERSOLL**, Esq. be a Committee to present the thanks of this Assembly to the Right Reverend **THOMAS C. BROWNELL**, for his Sermon delivered before this Assembly, at the opening thereof, and to request a copy of the same, that it may be printed.

A true Copy of Record,

Examined by

THOMAS DAY, *Secretary.*

SERMON.



PSALM 97th, VERSE 1st.

“ *THE LORD REIGNETH; LET THE EARTH REJOICE.*”



THE Providence and government of God extend to all the affairs of men. All his dispensations are administered with unerring wisdom and justice, and dictated by unbounded goodness. These ideas should be impressed upon the minds of all men; and both nations and individuals should embrace them as the grounds of their dependence and their trust.

Our religious ancestors cultivated a deep sense of the superintending Providence of God; and were accustomed to recognize it in all the great transactions of state, not less than in the private concerns of life. It is in pursuance of a pious custom derived from them, that the supreme Magistrate, and the Legislators of this Commonwealth, have now assembled to solemnize their election to office, and to seek the direction and blessing of God, in the exercise of their high responsibilities.

It will accord, then, with the occasion on which we have met, not less than with the import of the text I have chosen, that we should devote our thoughts to that directing and controlling Providence which the Supreme Being exercises in the affairs of the world; and establish our hearts by meditating on the perfect righteousness, wisdom, and goodness, with which its dispensations are administered.—“The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice.”

I. Man, in the pride and presumption of his heart, is fond of accounting for every thing through the agency of *second causes*. Limiting his views to these, he disregards the unseen Ruler of the

Universe, who gives to these causes their impulse and direction. Speculating upon national wars, he traces their origin to the ambition of princes, and the intrigues of politicians. Civil commotions, where the citizen is armed against the citizen, and where the brother's hand is raised against the brother;—these he regards as arising from the machinations of demagogues, working on the passions of the turbulent, and on the ignorance and prejudices of the weak. Dearth and famine, he attributes to unpropitious seasons; and the “pestilence, which walketh in darkness,” he ascribes to noxious vapours, and a tainted atmosphere. These he beholds as regular effects, constantly flowing from the same causes, and he looks no further. He imagines himself prepared to explain and to decide, with perfect confidence and self complacency. He sees not, nor recognizes HIM who regulates the course of nature, by laws established in infinite wisdom, and who over-rules the passions and the counsels of men to his own purposes: Him, who, “when he giveth quietness, none can make trouble:” Him, who can “make the heaven that is over our head brass, and the earth that is under our feet iron:” Who can send forth the “pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day:” Who can turn “a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.”

But let not the daring atheist think in his heart, which says there is no God, that these events are fortuitous. Let not the presumptuous speculatist ascribe them merely to the disorders of the elements, and the conflicts of human passions, in opposition to the plain dictates of revelation. Reason itself, no less than revelation, declares that amidst all these disorders of nature, and the confusion of nations, there is still a presiding and controlling Intelligence, secretly bringing light from the darkness: a Divine Spirit which moves over the troubled “face of the waters,” and harmonizes the chaos of the moral world, as it did originally that of nature.

If the order and beauty, the contrivance and design, which we observe in the works of nature, evince that the world was at first created by a wise, powerful, and benevolent Being; the continuance and preservation of the course of nature, demonstrate that it is upheld, directed, and governed by the same omnipotent wisdom and counsel. The celestial bodies are still kept and guided in their appointed orbits, and no planet dashes headlong from its course, spreading desolation through the system. All the elements of which the world is composed, however repugnant to each other

they may be, are preserved in their original equilibrium. The fire consumes not the air; and the water which the atmosphere elaborates from the ocean, it returns again to the same great depository. The sun still comes daily "forth from his chamber, rejoicing as a giant to run his course." Day and night; summer and winter; seed-time and harvest, are preserved in their regular vicissitudes; and the whole course of nature, upheld and directed by the hand that created it, still moves on without pause or decay. These facts demonstrate that there is a superintending and unerring Providence, "great in counsel, and mighty in work," that guides the motions of the heavens, and "bears up the pillars of the earth;" that recruits the decays of nature, and preserves the fabric ever the same.

Nor is the Providence of God less manifest in the affairs of men, than it is in the operations of nature. He who tempered the elements of the world, and moulded the minds of men as he willed, will sway them according to his pleasure. The great revolutions which decide the fate of nations, and change the face of the world, are moved and directed by his ~~almighty~~ influence. "Sitting upon the circle of the earth," he ~~wields and~~ guides these moral phenomena, as he directs the comet's ~~path~~ through the physical system; renovating the principles of life and growth, and by ways unknown but to himself, conducting all events to the great ends for which he first designed them.

"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," independent of the divine concurrence. The deepest designs of the greatest politicians are often made to terminate in folly. Their counsels are distracted, their measures broken, and their plans defeated. The unjust oppressor is often ruined by the unjust oppressor, in his turn; and they who have spoiled the widow and the orphan, often leave their own widows and orphans a prey to other spoilers. In these events we can not fail to trace the secret hand of Providence; that undiscernible hand, always wielded in righteousness, yet full of mercy and goodness; which governs and directs all the affairs of the world with unerring justice and inscrutable wisdom: which is so often opened to feed the hungry that cry for food; which is extended to relieve those who are oppressed, and to succour those who are in adversity or affliction; which "restrains the wrath of man," checks the tide of iniquity, even when its current seems most uncontrollable, and rescues the world from confusion and distraction, by ways which no human wisdom could contrive, or force effect.

It is not merely to the great events of the world that the superintending Providence of God is confined. All things and all events are subject to his direction. As nothing is too great for the control of the Almighty, so nothing is too small for his notice. And the same providential care which preserves the balance of the universe, guides the planets in their courses, and directs the destinies of nations, suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground unheeded, and even "numbers the very hairs of our heads."

In the material world, the Providence of God is absolute, and independent of any concurrence or co-operation. The springs of nature are in his hand, and he moves them as he pleases. When her wheels roll on silently and harmoniously; when the rains from heaven moisten and refresh the earth, and the breezes fan the air with health, we seldom look beyond these second causes. It is when the waters descend in a deluge upon the land, and when the hurricane sweeps it with desolation, that we recognize the hand of Providence. And it is especially when we read in the sacred records of the course of nature suspended, or subverted; when we read of the sun arrested in the midst of his career, or of a dry pathway made through the midst of the sea, the waters forming a wall upon the right hand and upon the left, that we are compelled to acknowledge the existence and control of a power above nature, whose fiat every thing in heaven and in earth must obey.

Towards his intelligent creatures, the Providence of God is exercised in concurrence with their own free-agency, and in consistency with their accountability. Having endowed them with the understanding to discern, and the will to choose, he does not subvert their rational powers; but his administration over them is exercised in a way which, however incomprehensible it may be to us, is still conformable to the capacities he has given them. We can not, indeed, perceive the divine influence on our minds. We have no sense to convey to us an impression of it. It is not cognizable by our consciousness; and our knowledge of the nature and intercourse of spirits, is too imperfect to enable us to comprehend the manner, or the degree, in which it is exerted. We can not understand the connexion between our mental faculties and our bodily organs, nor discover in what manner the volitions of our souls produce the corresponding movements of our bodies. How then shall we trace the connexion between the sovereign government of God, and the free-agency of man; or illustrate that obscure region, where they meet and blend together? "Such knowledge is too excellent for us; we

cannot attain unto it." Of this, however, we may be assured, that "though the heart of man deviseth his ways, yet the Lord directeth his steps;" and that having made man a rational and accountable creature, he governs and directs him in some way conformable to his nature, and compatible with the free exercise of his moral powers. The divine influence must, therefore, coalesce with our own free-agency. Its operations must combine with the voluntary operations of our own minds, though we are unable to distinguish or to separate them, or even to comprehend the manner in which they are exerted.

But perhaps we may properly make a distinction between God's government of men, when considered as moral agents, and in their relation to himself, and in his government over them in their relations to society, and as the instruments of his providence, in the general government of the world.

As a moral being, it seems to be the province of the divine government, to give laws to man for the regulation of his conduct; to annex to them the proper rewards of obedience, and the punishments of disobedience; and to bestow upon him such inward supplies of grace, as may counterbalance the weakness and corruption of his fallen nature: and thus, leaving him to his freedom, to reward or punish him as he shall deserve.

But when we consider men as members of society, the consequences of their actions extend beyond themselves, and affect the condition of others. Under such circumstances, it should seem that the Providence of God must be concerned so to control and direct their actions, as may best serve the purposes of his government in the world, and conform to the deserts of those who may be affected by their conduct.

It can not comport with the economy of divine Providence to make an individual good or bad; virtuous, or vicious, by irresistible force. But it may well accord with its dispensations, to induce men, by an unfelt influence, to do the good which they otherwise would not, and to abstain from the evil which they might be inclined to do. There will thus be a difference between the dispensation of Grace and that of Providence. The dispensation of Grace, looking chiefly to a future existence, will have for its object to ameliorate the nature of man, and make him virtuous and good, that he may be happy in another world. It can therefore admit of no greater force than is consistent with the free exercise of his moral powers. But

there are general dispensations of Providence, which relate to the temporal condition of men and of nations; to the happiness or misery which may be awarded to them in the present world, for their own discipline and improvement, and to manifest the divine retributions. For such purposes, since it does not affect their future accountability, God may make individuals or nations, the mere instruments of his Providence, and the agents by which he will accomplish the wise counsels of his judgment or mercy to mankind.

In whatever unknown ways, then, the Providence of God may be exercised, in these truths we may rest: It will not destroy the freedom or accountability of his intelligent creatures: It will be administered in righteousness and mercy; and it will surely effect the great ends of his government in the world. The moral as well as the physical agent is in his hands, and he knows how to make both subservient to his gracious purposes, although both may be alike unconscious of the wonderful ministration in which they are employed.

Such seem to be the reflections suggested by the first proposition of our text—"The Lord reigneth." The text also contains another proposition, which may be considered as a consequence of the first—"let the earth rejoice."

II. The earth may rejoice in the government of God, because it is exercised in righteousness and mercy. Let us then proceed to a more minute consideration of the rules by which the Providence and government of God are administered.

It is a general rule, with respect to individuals, that the Providence of God is manifested in rewarding the right exercise of their moral faculties, and in punishing the abuse of them; and that men are made happy or miserable, according as they are virtuous or vicious. For the transgression of our first parents, pain, and disease, and death, were inflicted on the whole human race; as a standing monument of God's displeasure against sin, and as a perpetual memento to mankind, of its awful consequences. If we look round upon society, we shall perceive that almost all the evils which it suffers, are the direct consequences of disobedience to the divine commands. Were each individual to "do to others as he would have others do to him," the most perfect equity would become universal, and it would be impossible that any one should suffer wrong. And were every man to "love his neighbour as himself," the most perfect benevolence would prevail throughout the world. Instead of those malignant passions which destroy the harmony of

social intercourse, every heart would be inspired with peace and love : and instead of those bitter contentions which self-interest and ambition create, the only emulation among men would be, who should contribute most to the diffusion of an universal charity. Thus the obedience and virtue of individuals, would ensure their own happiness and that of the community.

But since men will not obey the salutary laws of God, and since the present world is a state of discipline and probation, the economy of Providence has ordained pain and misery as the consequences of guilt ; in order to check the devices of the wicked, and to deter the good man from transgression. Yet while it is the general dispensation of Providence, that happiness shall be the concomitant of a life of righteousness, while misery is attendant on guilt, the rule is not so universal as to destroy human liberty. It does not always make a man's virtue and piety the exact measure of his temporal happiness—much less that of his worldly prosperity. The ungodly sometimes “prosper in the world, and increase in riches,” while the righteous man appears to have “cleansed his heart in vain.” Yet we need not distrust the righteous Providence of God. We need not become “envious at the foolish,” nor “stumble at the prosperity of the wicked.” When we take a more enlarged view of the divine government, and come to “understand their end,” we shall find that they ever “stand on slippery places,” and that they are often “brought to sudden desolation.” And even in these deviations from the general law of Providence, we shall discern the traces of that more perfect dispensation which will take place in another world. We shall read in them the intimations of that great day of final retribution, appointed by the Judge of “quick and dead,” when “for the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find, according to his ways.”

It is, therefore, by connecting the dispensations of both worlds together, that we learn rightly to estimate the awards of Providence. Thus we shall learn, that though wickedness may for a time triumph, while goodness lies prostrate, and is trampled upon, yet there is, in the end, an indissoluble connexion between virtue and happiness—between vice and misery ; and that justice is ever the great rule of the divine government.

The Providence of God with respect to nations, differs in one important particular, from the measure of its dispensations with regard to individuals. Its rewards and punishments extend not beyond the present state. In their national capacity they must re-

ceive the award of their deserts. They can not await the retribution of the general judgment.

Human laws punish the individual, to preserve the peace of society. A nation stands in the same relation to the aggregate of mankind, that an individual does to the community; and if it violate the laws which the Supreme Being has imposed to secure the peace and happiness of the world, the good of the great society of nations requires that it should receive the penalties of its guilt. For national transgressions, therefore, God inflicts national punishments. He chastises sinful nations with the scourge of war. He sends upon them the blight, and the mildew; famine and pestilence; and he takes from them the blessings which they have abused or despised. "Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen!" Why? "Because their tongue and their doings were against the Lord."—"Her staff and her stay is taken away from her, and the man of war, and the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, and the honourable men, and the counsellor—for she cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."

But though there be this difference in the dispensations of Providence to individuals, and towards nations, yet the rule of the divine government is ever the same, and the same great law is extended to both:—The practice of virtue and religion is rewarded with the blessings of Heaven, while wickedness and impiety as surely bring down the divine punishments upon the guilty.

So manifest has been the economy of Providence, in this respect, that it has not escaped the observation even of the Heathen. Such nations have always esteemed it necessary to be just and good; not merely from a sense of present advantage, but from a firm conviction that it was required of them by the gods. And if we trace the history of these nations, we shall find the brightest periods of their glory, to have been when this sentiment was the most deeply impressed on the public mind, and when the bonds of civil life were sanctified by a feeling of their dependence upon Heaven. The illustrious nation, which of all others most interests the youthful imagination;—the nation which for so long a period occupied the attention of the world, and which fills so large a space in the pages of history;—of this nation it has been well remarked, that "if in many things the Romans were inferior to others, in piety to the gods they were superior to all." Whether contending for their national safety, or warring for victory and conquest, it was

the first care both of their senate and the people, to propitiate the deities, who were supposed to be the protectors of Rome: and nothing could inspire confidence in their generals, or their armies, if any of the prescribed rites had been neglected. When their eagles were sent forth to battle, they were first consecrated to the gods. And if disaster or defeat attended them, these were supposed to be the consequence of some neglected rite, or of the prevalence of national vice and impiety. These superstitions, however absurd or extravagant they may appear, seem yet to be the result of some impression of the retributive justice of Heaven, derived from an observation of the course of human affairs, or stamped originally on the creature man, by the Creator himself:— A sentiment, however, which causes the most ignorant tribes to strive to propitiate the favour of their deities, and deprecate their displeasure, through a thousand erring ways.

But if the natural powers of reason and observation, or the remains of some original light, still shedding its feeble ray over the moral world, enabled the very heathen nations to perceive (though “through a glass darkly”) that there must be some Superior Power which presided over the world;—a power on which they were dependent, and to which they were accountable;—which rewarded their virtue and their piety with blessings, and sent down its punishments for their vice and irreligion; how manifest must all these truths appear under the clear light of revelation?

In the pages of the Holy Scriptures, we are every where instructed in the great truth that “righteousness exalteth a nation,” but that “sin is a reproach to any people.” This lesson is inculcated by direct precept, and by historical instruction; and above all, by the dispensations of Providence towards that distinguished nation—so long the “peculiar people” of God. By his servant Moses, he “set before them blessing and cursing;”—the rewards of righteousness, and the penalties of sin. By his prophets, he expostulated with them for their disobedience, and warned them of his impending judgments. When they kept his laws, and sought the Lord in righteousness, he enlarged their borders, and blessed them with prosperity. When they rebelled, and worshipped other gods, he chastised them with famine and with pestilence, with the sword and with captivity. And notwithstanding all their perverseness, and incorrigible wickedness, it was not till they had filled up the measure of their guilt, by the rejection and crucifixion of his beloved Son, that the arm of divine justice fell upon their land, annihilated

their national existence, and scattered the remnant of the inhabitants among all people that dwell upon the face of the earth.

If we except the Jewish nation, we shall find no portion of the world where the hand of divine Providence has been so clearly discernible, or where its dispensations have been marked with such distinguished mercies, as in our own happy country. When we look back upon the history of two short centuries, and trace the progress of the little bands of pilgrims which first landed on our shores;—when we see them rapidly converting the savage wilderness into fertile fields; while the tide of population spreads along the coasts, and swells beyond the western mountains;—when we see this people successfully sustaining the arduous struggle of the war of Independence, and advancing in the path of national greatness, till they have become a mighty Republic of freemen, with the noblest literary and religious institutions, and with the most perfect government under heaven, we can not fail to perceive, that if ever a nation experienced the peculiar favour of Providence, we are that people. And adopting the language of the Legislator of Israel, we may say, “What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is, in all that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous?”

Let these distinguished national blessings, excite in us a corresponding national gratitude; and let us cherish the consideration, that the destinies of our country are still in the hands of the same superintending Providence. And while we thus discharge the first of duties which religion enjoins, we shall also be laying the foundation of the most exalted patriotism. We shall learn to love our country, not merely on account of the selfish interests which bind us to it, but because it is the favoured place appointed by the Almighty for the developement of our physical and intellectual faculties, and for the range of our moral affections; and because we can find no worthier resting-place for these affections, except in that better country, reserved for the righteous, in the heavens. Such a patriotism connects in one view, both the present and the future world, and combines its influence with that of religion, to induce us to act our parts well here, with a reference to the rewards of eternity.

According to the principles which have now been advanced, and if the divine government be administered in conformity to the rules which have been stated, it follows, that whether we consider ourselves as individuals, as members of the community, or as Legisla-

tors, we have all of us important duties to perform.—If the superintending Providence of God, be exercised in a way compatible with our freedom and accountability, it becomes our duty to concur and co-operate with its gracious designs, and to act in conformity to the righteous laws of its administration.

As individuals, it becomes our duty to live “soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world;” to render a faithful and willing obedience to all the divine commands, and cordially to embrace that way of salvation, through the righteousness and atonement of a crucified Redeemer, which is revealed in the Gospel;—and then, submissively and confidingly, to await the issue of the divine counsels. Such a life, if it do not bring to us all that temporal happiness which the general economy of Providence allows us to hope for, will still be attended with the richest consolations; and in that future world, where the righteous dispensations of Providence shall be consummated, it will insure to us everlasting felicity.

As members of the community, and as Legislators, it becomes our duty to promote the principles of equity and justice, to cherish the public morals, and to cultivate a fervent and enlightened national piety; as forming, according to the order of Providence, the only sure basis of national prosperity.

The first principles of our private and our public duties are, therefore, the same. They coincide in their elements, and are alike connected with the cultivation of morality and religion. And if the blessedness of individuals is the reward of a life of righteousness, so also the liberty, the prosperity, and the stability of nations, are founded on the moral and religious character of the individuals who compose them.—If our country is now free, prosperous, and happy, it is the award of Providence for the piety and the virtues of our forefathers. The blessings can only be preserved and perpetuated by the virtues and the piety of their descendants.

In revolving the history of past times, we perceive that the most distinguished nations have had their periods of prosperity and decline. Many of the greatest empires which have excited the admiration of the world, are now annihilated, and nothing remains of them but their name. Some have fallen the victims of civil dissensions; others have been swept away by the tide of conquest; and some have dwindled into insignificance, by the natural progress of luxury and effeminacy. In the same pages which relate the decline and dissolution of these nations, we read of the general corruption of public morals, and the degeneracy of national char-

acter, which preceded their fall. It is the order of Providence, that in the moral, as well as in the natural world, the same causes shall produce the same effects. So long as the principles of a pure morality, and an enlightened religion, are cherished by individuals, and diffused throughout a nation, that nation will remain free, prosperous and happy. But whenever the people become dissolute and licentious; when the sanctuaries of legislation and of justice shall become venal and corrupt, and the temples of religion shall be neglected, or polluted by infidelity, the degradation and final overthrow of such a people, will be sure to mark the impartial justice of the divine administration.

While Heaven protects and blesses our country, then, let us bear it impressed on our minds, that the rewards of righteousness, will not be continued to the ungrateful, the vicious, or the profane. Let us carefully practice ourselves, and strive to diffuse throughout the community, the principles of a sound morality; let us cherish in our hearts, and profess before the altars of our God, the doctrines of his pure and undefiled religion; and let us appropriate to ourselves, and conscientiously observe, the exhortation of Jehovah to the leader of his ancient people;—"Only observe to do according to all the law which I command thee; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left;—so shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and so shalt thou have good success."

